

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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MASTERS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (MRE) DEGREE


SENIOR ESSAY TOPIC

THE NEED FOR FUNCTIONAL CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION IN THE BLACK BAPTIST CHURCH

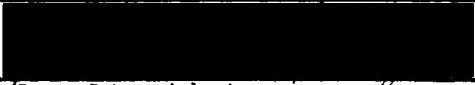
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INTRODUCTION

For the last fifteen years, I have been actively involved in the work of the church. My duties have included ushering, singing in the choir, assistant director of Christian Education and Associate Pastor. My services have covered three states and five cities.

Based upon my classroom experiences in the area of Christian Education, my field experience and my exposure in the various churches, I have come to realize that Christian Education is extremely vital to the life of a well ordered church structure. However, I have observed in most of the churches in which I was affiliated did not have a smooth functioning Christian Education Department. In two of the churches in Detroit, Michigan, the role of the Christian Education director was not clearly defined. As a result of this problem, there was constant confusion between the pastor, director and chairman of the deacon board in terms of how money was being spent for the purchase of Sunday School material and other items needed for a well structured Christian Education program such as film strips, workshop facilities and time set aside for planning and implementation. The communication between the various organizations of the church were not conducive for a well organized program.

When I enrolled at I.T.C. and took part in the field experience, I observed that one of the two churches in which I worked, the rapport between the members of the Christian Education Department and the pastor was in constant tension. I later learned that the director of the department was somewhat disgruntled because of her lack of power to run the program as she felt it should have been run. This resulted in the absence of a regular training program for teacher

and staff and a laxity in the selecting of adequate material that was part of the responsibility of the Christian Education Department.

In an effort to stress the importance and the function of Christian Education in the Black Baptist Church, this paper will address itself to selected and pertinent aspects of Christian Education.

A. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to author-lecturer Kenneth O. Gangel, the Christian church is suffering immensely because of its laxity in the area of Christian Education. The problem is that many of the members who make up the Black Baptist Churches are being deprived of spiritual growth and development that is the prerequisite to abundant Christian living.

B. THE PURPOSE

The purpose will be to stress educational aims and emphasis in view of the Christian experience deemed vital and precious to Christian Education.

C. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This paper will focus on foundation, leadership and methods imperative for Christian Education.

D. STATEMENT OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The information used in this study has been gathered from field study experiences, relevant literature found in the I.T.C. library and from my personal library.

E. DEFINITION OF PRINCIPLE TERMS

- Worship - The experiences involving the essence of renewal of Christian life.
- Christian - One who professes a hope in Christ.
- Church - A body of confessed sinners.
- Functional - The proper action for which a person embarks upon

THE NEED FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE BLACK BAPTIST CHURCH

The need for Christian Education in the Black Baptist church is especially great today. It is the first school outside of the home where moral and ethical lessons are taught from the Christian point of view. The Christian Education Department has the responsibility of training its members in the area of Christian ethics and moral behavior. Most people who attend church do not accept the teachings of everyone, nor do they accept and understand the sermons they hear from Sunday to Sunday. It is therefore necessary for the Christian Education Department to set some basic building blocks that can be carried into all areas of life by its members. Those who are in leadership roles can assist people in their understanding of God, and the many ways that He confronts mankind. The leaders can also help people understand that God speaks to His children as sinners, not because there is no hope for them, but because He loves them and would have them meet Jesus Christ and be forgiven of their sins.

Christian Education can play an important role in helping people think of themselves in a positive light. The task of the church from the Black perspective is to meet the needs, to support and advance that which is in the real interest of Black people.

Christian Education is needed to develop a healthy and regular prayer habit during the formative period of the Christian life. It is imperative for the Christian to develop the pattern of regular prayer periods. This can aid in coping with the problems and frustrations of life. The Christian with a regular and healthy prayer life is less likely to be a discipline problem.

During my field experiences since entering this institution, I have worked in two Baptist churches. Although I have maintained good rapport with the various pastors and other church officials, I have not been too impressed with the kind of Christian Education programs that I have observed. There seemed to have been little concern in the area of education. However, I shall continue to give what I think is vital to Christian Education in the Black Baptist church. In most instances, we gather weekly but seldom accomplish very much. I found it extremely difficult to implement the ideas and instructional information gathered from my instructors and from my reading. It was difficult because we seemed to have been on a different wave length. There were, however, times when I was able to work with groups and introduce my ideas to them with some degree of success. On one occasion, we were able to put together a program entitled Operation Outreach. This program came under the direction of the Christian Education Department. It was designed to extend a helping hand to those who were outside of the church family. This particular program is still in existence although I am not as actively involved as I was earlier.

One of the biggest problems faced by the Black Baptist Churches today is the need of an outreach program that extends itself beyond the walls of the building where members assemble. Because of the tumultuous times in which we are living, the foundation that the church can provide will enable us to become fulfilled human beings, and develop moral and spiritual values that are expedient to life.

I concur with Riggins Earl's Essay, "Christian Education In the Black Church", (Nashville: The National Baptist Publishing

Board, 1972) when he said that God is interested in the growth and development of human personality. Whatever prevents personalities from flowering into its noblest expression in the individual must be contrary to God's purpose and what enables personalities to become nobler and more Christlike is in accordance with God's purpose.

PRAYER AND SCRIPTURE IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

I am of the opinion that the use of the Bible is a vital need in the education of the members in the Black Baptist Church. In my observation during my field experience, the Bible was used too seldom. Many Christians look at the Bible as an important book but somehow they do not read it with understanding. It is often read as a casual endeavor, perhaps out of force of habit. They seem to be content by just taking the minister's word for granted. There does not seem to be an asserted effort on the part of some Black preachers to teach the Bible as it should be taught. Therefore, the scripture does not come across to the members as being vital, exciting and life changing. They accept the Bible as God's word, but they have not yet experienced it as God's personal work to them.

As we study the scriptures, we realize through the word that God makes loving demands upon us, and His reconciling work is to be found both in our moral life as we interact with one another and also in our moral life as members of a society and a culture. Our failure to respond to God's action in our life of individual relationship results in the breakdown of these relationship. Our failure to respond to God's action in our corporate life as a society results in social chaos.

Christian Education has the task of keeping central the church's mission as it relates to God's action now, but this is not to say that it can afford to neglect God's past actions or the sure and certain hope of His future actions. One means of meeting this situation is to envision the task of Christian Education as nothing less than the communication of the gospel.

THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In David Hunter's, "Christian Education as Engagement", (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), he says that the theology of a Christian Education Program is determined by what it assumes about God, about the mission of the church, and about salvation. It will either be theistic or essentially deistic, according to the amount of attention it gives the action of God in the lives of learners and throughout all creation. Its understanding of the church and the mission of the church will be revealed by the degree to which it consciously and persistently provides its people with training in the ongoing never-ending task of sharing Christ's ministry of reconciliation in the world.

When we think in terms of the church in relation to the Black man's life, we realize just how important its function is to his well being. The church was the Black man's life. It was the organizing principle around which his life was structured. James Cone, "Black Theology of Liberation" (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1970) says that "the church was the Black man's school, his forum, his political arena, his social club and his conservatory of music. His religion was his fellowship with man, his audience with God." The church was the sustaining force which gave strength and a sense of oneness to his fragmented life. It was because of their religion that they refused to surrender to the contradictions of life. They believed that life

was an evolving cycle that would one day evolve in their favor. Perhaps this might well explain the reason why they could stand in the center of life's battlefield and declare victory in the midst of a raging tempest. In Howard Thurman's, "The Inward Journey" (Indiana: Harper & Row, 1961) he says that our responsibility as Black Christians in America has been to defend our right to be. He suggests that we must first of all accept our fact and learn how to deal with whatever our fact might be. The situation we find ourselves in is uniquely our own, but it is not conclusive and we can look at the history of our heritage and see how those brave sisters and brothers transformed their conditions by refusing to give up or give in to the forces around them that threatened to destroy them.

The Black Baptist Church today must continue to provide capable leaders who by their charisma and personal strength as individuals can lead, but they must coordinate their efforts with other capable leaders in the various churches in an effort to solidify the Christian Education programs.

OBJECTIVES AND FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

I will now turn my attention to the objectives and foundations of Christian Education. This section is devoted to exploring the foundation of Christian Education and its present objectives. In 1930, Paul H. Vieth reflected both the theological and educational insights of the period and proposed seven objectives in religious education, to which an eighth was added later. The International Council of Religious Education adopted them "as a basic document for curriculum work, subject to revision from time to time as further

experience may make desirable."¹

Briefly stated the objectives were:

1. Christian religious education seeks to foster in growing persons a consciousness of God as a reality in human experience.
2. Seeks to develop an understanding and appreciation of personality, life and teaching of Jesus.
3. Seeks to foster a progressive development of a Christlike character.
4. Seeks to develop the ability and disposition to participate in and contribute to the building of a social order throughout the world, embodying the idea of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man.
5. Seeks to develop the ability to participate in the church.
6. Seeks to lead persons into a Christian interpretation of life and the universe thereby building a philosophy on this interpretation.
7. Seeks to effect the assimilation of the best religious experience, pre-eminently that recorded the Bible as effective guidance to present experience.

To understand the central thrust of Christian Education, one must understand the educational ministry of the church and realize Christianity is the faith of a community living in history. It is

¹Marvin J. Taylor, An Introduction to Christian Education.
(New York: Abingdon Press: 1966). p. 68

the life of a community of people responding to God in love. Hence, Christian Education may be described as the effort to introduce persons into the life and mission of the community of Christian faith. This conception of Christian Education is consistent with biblical understanding of the church and with findings of recent educational psychology about the learning process.

The nature of Christian Education is determined by the fact of a community of people who continually respond to God's activity in the world. Such education historically borrowed ideas from pagan and secular sources; today it may learn from new developments in psychology and public education.

Surveying Christian Education through history provides insight for the church today as it strives to carry out its teaching function. From the biblical period into the Twentieth Century, Christian educators are searching history to understand effective forms of education in other periods when somewhat similar conditions existed and to gain a deeper grasp of how and by what forces the present forms emerged. Rapidly changing society necessitates change in Christian Education. Faced with this challenge, churches are forced to search for patterns which will be effective in the years ahead.

The Christian faith does not exist apart from interpretation or theology. Thus, when we speak of the Christian faith or the gospel as one of the aims of Christian teaching, this is the theological foundation of the teaching-learning transaction. Christian educators are therefore dependent upon professional and systematic theologians to explicate the Christian faith. There are three major points at which theology is related to teaching. The church has a

faith to communicate and this faith must be stated theologically. Teaching as witness to one's faith (trust, conviction, relationship) moves toward knowledge too. The teacher can talk about God and witness to his or her own relation to God. Both types of knowledge are part of the theological content of teaching. Secondly, theology effects our understanding of the process of teaching. If we understand the Christian faith in terms of ethical values or as a relationship with God, we will seek for a process of education for transmission of given concepts.

Thirdly, methods and process are closely related. Methods grow out of process and both grow out of theology. Generally, Christian educators will borrow their methods from general education and cognate disciplines.

Revelation and the biblical witness play important roles in contemporary theoretical formulation of Christian Education. The centrality of the Bible is obvious. It is the beginning point. It is the channel through which God may come to confront man. It has intrinsic, commanding authority. Its relevance is evidenced as it takes hold of the very being of a person, transforms him, and guides him toward living a Christian life. The Bible becomes relevant as it answers questions and revelatory as the dynamic activity of God is perceived through historical events and ongoing activities.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The organizational structure of the church are channels of communication by which those who are the church make visible the image of the church. The church is the body of Christ and its ministries are proclamation, teaching, worship, fellowship, witness and service.

The teaching ministry of the church assists persons in deciding to become a part of the church in training for discipleship and participating in the mission of the church.

Organic View of Structure

The church when called by the body of Christ is being viewed organically.² The church is viewed as the family of God with Jesus as the head. Under this structure, emphasis is placed on unity and the efficiency of chosen leaders. This view of structure also assists in developing specialized leaders.

Purpose of Church Administration

The main purpose of the church, however, must not be forgotten; it is to help persons become aware of God's activity through Jesus Christ. The structure of the local church should help individuals perceive God's work and provide form for individual and corporate response. If this response is in faith and love, the form of the church's program will enable individuals to grow in depth of response.

Purposeful church administration is the involvement of the church in the discovery of the nature and mission and in moving in a coherent and comprehensive manner toward providing such experience as will enable the church to utilize all her resources and personnel in the fulfillment of her mission of making known God's Love for all men.³

²J. R. Coan, "The Mission of the Black Church," in To You Who Teach In The Black Church: Essays On Christian Education In The Black Church. Ed. Riggins Earl, Jr. (Nashville: The National Baptist Publishing Board, 1972), p. 115

³Kenneth R. Cober, The Church's Teaching Ministry, (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1964), p. 99

Leadership Theory

The need for leadership development is apparent in the Black Baptist Church. However, one of the most difficult tasks in leadership education is to help every leader recognize his need for training, and for keeping his training up-to-date.

Leadership may be defined as:

The performance of a service by a person with a group of persons in such a way as to help them to further the purpose of their group.⁴

Several conclusions may be drawn from this definition. First, leadership does not operate in isolation. The decisive factor of a good leader is determined by the degree to which he is able to stimulate and motivate the group to action. Second, leadership is effective only to the extent of which the group accomplishes its purpose. Third, the leader's relationship to the group is somewhat of a "passive nature". He does not symbolize a status leader who is interested in manipulating persons but rather a master of leadership skills, who aids the group in achieving its purpose. Fourth, leadership is not synonymous with holding an office. Thus, there is the designated leader who has an official responsibility and the undesignated leader who unofficially helps the group achieve its objective.

WORSHIP IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Within recent years, changing concepts have emerged and new emphasis has been stressed in the field of worship and Christian

⁴Alvin J. Lindgren, Foundations for Purposeful Church Administration (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 87

Education. Grant S. Shockley, a contributor to Marvin Taylor's book, An Introduction to Christian Education, concluded in his chapter on "Worship in Christian Education" that currently, the worship experience is being thought of as the essence of the renewal of Christian life. Other developments show that worship is being regarded as "celebration". It is the celebration of life and the acclaim and thanksgiving to God for the victory of Christ.

Shockley sets forth proposals for education for worship for children, youth, and adults. Having recognized the centrality of Christ's lordship in worship, the aims are as follows:

to develop in individuals the realization of their capacities to adore and serve God in Christ whose lordship they acknowledge.

to assist individuals in initiating, cultivating and sustaining a personal relationship to Christ that will allow the offering receiving of His love and fellowship.

to celebrate continuously to "^{to}worth-ship" of God through reverence, mission and vocation.

to make individuals aware of the availability of God's every resource in meeting their continuing needs.

to guide individuals in their personal responses of obedience with regard for their maturity, experience, and opportunities to act as Christians.

⁵Marvin J. Taylor, An Introduction To Christian Education. (New York: Abingdon Press: 1966), p. 68

Shockley further discussed worship in the family, the church school and worship, children's worship, youth and adult worship and family corporate worship. He sets forth proposals for each age group, educationally based. Such suggestions consisted of spontaneous moments of awe (children) which could be utilized to show moments of the beauty of nature, wonder or compassion. Christian Education teachers could also use stories, songs, litanies, sentence prayers, dialogue, art, meditation moments, group worship and play-acting a parable.

The principle end of worship is communication with God. One principle task of Christian Education is to work with each age group in evolving worship setting and bring life into Christian focus and initiate a continuous dialogue between God and man.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to develop a study on the need for a functional Christian Education program that would enhance the awareness of the members of the Black Baptist Church. I have attempted to speak from the well-springs of my experiences from both the field experience and the classroom.

It is my desire to continue to grow and develop my understanding of the various pertinent dimensions of Christian Education that have been reflected in this study. There is much more to be learned and put into constructive use for the enhancement of the church.

It is hoped that the approach used in this study will be advantageous for future research in Christian Education.

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